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February 6, 1956

Dear Mr. Hoover:

As you are aware, the problem of regularizing the Department of State radio communications operations in foreign countries has been under study for about five years. An ad hoc committee under the Chairmanship of the Assistant Director of CSM for Telecommunications has prepared a staff paper on the subject, recommending a change in the Federal Communications Act so as to permit the President to authorize bilateral agreements with selected nations for the operation of radio transmitters in diplomatic establishments. It is envisaged that such agreements would provide limitations adequate to assure satisfactory control. The staff paper explains in some detail, the compelling need for the regularized operation of such facilities in certain of our missions abroad.

I consider of significant interest the fact that the British Government, among others, has operated a world-wide diplomatic network for 17 or 18 years, taking it as a diplomatic right and offering reciprocal privileges. In their judgment, as expressed to senior United States communications officials, the network has justified itself beyond all cost, security, and intelligence considerations. They have stated, in fact, that intelligence gleaned from monitoring such transmissions far surpasses what can be obtained from analysis of commercial transmissions.

Mr. Bartlett, your Liaison Officer, discussed this subject with me in my office last week and he indicated that FBI had some reservations and foresaw certain problems in connection with such activity. In accordance with his suggestion, I am forwarding to you the staff paper prepared by the ad hoc committee, along with a copy of language prepared by FCC for the proposed legislative change.

The Department

The Honorable

J. Edgar Hoover,
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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The Departments of State and Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency have reached agreement on the necessity and expediency of the proposed action. The DCI interposes no objection. In view of the obvious desirability of a unanimous recommendation to the Congress by the agencies materially affected, I sincerely hope that the PSI can concur in the proposal on the basis of over-all United States interest. If on the other hand, you feel that in its present form it introduces security considerations which make it unacceptable, I should be glad to have your suggestions for additional safeguards which you would consider essential.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Murphy
Deputy Under Secretary

Attachments:

As stated.

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